

HIDDEN GREATNESS IS GREATER

“When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom” John 2:9 ESV

Second Sunday after the Epiphany



The Epiphany Season, as our closing hymn (Songs of Thankfulness and Praise) for today will so wonderfully summarize is all about God in flesh made manifest. So if God in flesh is to be made manifest you might expect some mighty dramatic things to happen. And they do. There is the brilliant astronomical

phenomena of a star leading the wise men over “field and fountain, moor and mountain”. The star and resulting presence of the wise men troubles King Herod and all Jerusalem with him. In the First Sunday after the Epiphany there is the twelve year old Jesus in the Temple outshining the doctors of the day in the presence of the pilgrim throngs. There is the Christ Baptized in the Jordan with the dove coming down, the heavens being torn open and the voice of God saying “This is my Son with whom I am well pleased “Listen to Him”. Next Sunday is Transfiguration, the climax and conclusion of the Epiphany season, Jesus shines

brighter than the sun, speaking to Moses and Elijah on the Mountain Peak. So you might expect Jesus' first public miracle, to be equally and visually dramatic, consistent with Epiphany's thematic light, like Joshua who commanded the sun to stand still so a battle might be won.

But no, it's water into wine. There isn't even an audience who gets to see through the clay to get a visual of clear water turned red wine red. The whole thing takes place in the back room. No one of importance knows. The Master of the feast does not witness it. There's only a few lowly servants who witness what happens. I don't think they were really watching or grasping what was going on. It's amazing that they weren't recorded as being ecstatic after witnessing it all. Only Mary and Our Lord's closest disciples, they are the guys with the halos on your bulletin covers, are recorded as having been spiritually impacted by the miracle. The text records, only that "And his disciples believed in him." There stood no amazed crowds. As our illustrator has drawn, most of the people continue their partying unaware of the miracle in their midst. Not so much of a spectacular spectacle.

But is it? Wonders beyond the sight of most are no less wondrous because most can't see them. It's like the intricate carvings and gargoyles on the pinnacle of Notre Dame Cathedral. The multitudes below cannot possibly see them. But the artist is not distressed. The bell ringer sees them. Angels may fly by and wonder. And of course, nothing escapes the eye of the Almighty.

But the wonder of water in wine is not in show stopping theatrics. Really, Jesus doesn't set out to impress but instead to impact the lives of people with his love. Here is where the real miracle always is. It is the "first of his signs" pointing to Jesus as powerful in His love. He goes beyond just "the powerful one" to

show himself as the “powerful one who shows love to people with real problems”.

The newly married couple were about to lose their day. Mary says “They have no more wine” with desperation in her voice. Now wine, for many of us is a luxury. It's expensive. Run out of wine and there are lots of other things to drink. A multiplicity of fruit juices, vegetable juice, soda (diet, near diet and full sugar based) carbonated water, coffee, tea, even water from the tap. But in the days of Jesus you basically had water and you had wine. There may have been some beer and some spirits also. Maybe some goat milk. But mostly they had water and they had wine as staple drinks.

Run out of wine and you run out of fuel for the celebration. And Jesus knew it. His “hour had not yet come” but the time for compassion is “always now”. Nothing would ever stop Jesus from showing compassion. We see that time and again. Not even the man made rules concerning the Sabbath. So Jesus acted. Jesus shows us the kind of God in flesh made manifest to us. He is the God of compassion, abundance and bringer of joy. He so often does brings healing, comfort and joy without drama. He operates under the appearance of the ordinary and even weakness to bring to us all things extraordinary and strong. Water is poured in clear and cold into the clay ceremonial jars. It pours out as red fine wine. But not everyone sees it.

It was our Lord's plan to continue operating in such a way, even into today. Jesus prepared for the end of his public ministry in the same way he began it, with a feast, bread and wine at hand. It was in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday that he took mere bread and wine and by his Word declared the fullness of His body and blood to be in our midst every time we celebrate the Lord's

Supper, as a foretaste of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb until he comes.

Water into wine! Now that's a miracle. But now, how about having His own body to be taken "in, with, and under" bread? How about His own blood drunk "in, with, and under" wine. Jesus takes common things of this life and makes a sacrament. Incredible. In his first miracle Jesus takes ordinary water and transforms it into wine. In the Upper Room, and then till the end of time he takes common wine and by His Word alone connected with it, offers us His very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. And that gift is everything for with the forgiveness of sins comes life and salvation. With the forgiveness of sins comes entrance into the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

And does everybody see the wonder of this miracle as we celebrate the sacrament? Not a chance! Most of the people are consumed with the party of life in the background. Others, like the servants, might be on the front lines where things are happening but they are closed to the Holy Spirit so they don't believe or see the glory. Unfortunately, that is the case with many attending the celebration of our Eucharist. But for the saints, built on the faith of prophets and apostles, there's depth of meaning, nearness to heaven, the wedding feast of the Lamb and strengthening in faith and love.

When does it all begin? On the third day! In the life of Christ, it's always "on the third day" that exciting things happen. On the third day Jesus and his disciples attend the wedding feast. On the third day, it's the Day of Resurrection, And Jesus bursts forth from the Tomb in glory and the soldiers guarding it are shaken, falling to the ground like dead men. On the Third Day Jesus is risen from the dead and it means for us who are baptized into his

life, death and resurrection , entrance into the Wedding Feast of the Lamb. And the Words of Jesus come to us ““I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”

I’m looking forward to having a drink with Jesus in the eternal kingdom. In the meantime he gives us a truly sustaining drink at His Lord’s Supper: His Body and Blood. We are sustained to follow Him to glory, but along the way to share His sacrificial love, with couples, with wedding guests and with all people. May we be sustained to be people with compassion like Jesus who saved a couple’s wedding feast from disaster. May we find, that the hidden greatness is greater.

Amen.